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Self-Regulation in a Preschool Classroom

Karen Ruby Vasquez

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

Introduction

This capstone project focuses on preschool aged children's development of self regulation. Self-regulation involves children's developing ability to regulate their emotions, thoughts and behaviors to enable them to act in positive ways toward a goal. Working in a preschool made me learn that some children have a harder time controlling their emotions and behaviors than older children. During preschool children start using basic self regulation such as paying attention, and adjusting behaviors. For example, controlling their frustration, embarrassment and excitement. They also learn how to wait for a certain period of time or use their words for others to understand what they need. Furthermore, good early self-regulation is associated with later positive developmental outcomes. "Supporting self regulation development in early childhood is an investment in later success, because stronger self-regulation predicts better performance in school, better relationships with others, and fewer behavioral difficulties. Moreover, the ability to regulate thoughts, feelings, and actions helps children successfully negotiate many of the challenges they face, promoting resilience in the face of adversity (Rosanbalm, 2017) First, my project taught children how to emotionally regulate when feeling sad or mad when it is play time. Second, I taught children how to stay on task during circle time or class activities. Lastly, preschool children will raise their hand before speaking. My capstone project will address this by providing three lessons that will help my students with self regulation. I will complete these lessons at Laura's Barn Child Care and Preschool with the children aged 4-5 years old.

Needs Statement

Preschool children have a harder time with self regulation than older children do . They might struggle controlling their feelings and emotions. During preschool, children do not have the vocabulary or social skills to explain what they want or need (Abrams, 2023). Different things can affect a child's ability to self regulate. If a child is tired, ill or has a different routine can affect their ability to self regulate. It is important to remember that a child can have great self regulation at school or home and have bad self regulation at school or home. The lack of self regulation skills can lead to the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges. When adults help preschool aged children regulate their feelings, they learn how to regulate their emotions in social situations, listen to classroom instructions and control their behavior. I will go over how children should learn to express their feelings, stay on task and control their body during circle time. During preschool children start using basic self regulation such as paying attention, and adjusting behaviors. For example, controlling their frustration, embarrassment and excitement. They also learn how to wait for a certain period of time or use their words for others to understand what they need.

Self regulation is a child's ability to manage thoughts, feelings and behaviors in a way that enables goal directed actions (Peacock, 2023). Every age has different stages of self regulation from birth to 5 years old. From birth to 18 months, infants are at a very young age of self regulation. At this age they might cry when expressing their feelings, but it is not poor self regulation. At ages 18 months to 3 years old, children should be able to focus when receiving instructions or working on something for example, an activity. Not only that but be able to describe or mention what they are feeling. If they are unable to understand or deal with their feelings they might ask an adult to help them understand. From ages 3 to 5 years old, at this age children start to recognize their own feelings and the feelings of others (Peacock,2023).

The first area addressed in my project on self-regulation is emotional regulation. Emotional regulation is a set of mental skills and habits for dealing with big or uncomfortable feelings like anger, frustration, excitement, anxiety or stress. These skills are associated with the capacity to soothe, self-calm and cope with uncertainty in the external environment (Peacock,2023). Preschool children sometimes have a hard time expressing their feelings when something is bothering them. For example, if a friend takes a toy away from them they often start crying instead of communicating to their friend that the toy they took away was theirs. Some children might feel very frustrated by what is happening and maybe won't be able to control their own feelings and emotions. A strategy that can be used to help children calm down is taking deep breaths. Letting them know something like " I know you're frustrated right now and I understand what you're feeling but let's take a deep breath together." A teacher and parents can also use helpful phrases, positive imagery, and use visual aids (Abrams, 2023). Something that parents and teachers should avoid is harsh or severe discipline because children can have mental health problems. (Abrams,2023). When children express their emotions, we have to accept them. It is important to educate children. Listening to their emotions is very important too. Teachers or parents shouldn't list an emotion as good or bad. Lastly, model healthy emotional expressions (Lockhart, 2021).

A second area I addressed is behavioral self-regulation. Behavioral self regulation is a set of mental skills that allow a child to engage healthy behaviors and avoid unhealthy behaviors as a means of regulating negative emotions. These skills are associated with the capacity to self-manage classroom behavior, inhibit negative behavioral impulses and focus on goal attainment (Peacock, 2023). This project taught preschool aged children why it is important to stay on task during circle time. Circle time is a very important part of preschool aged children.

During circle time a teacher will most likely go over ABC's, numbers, days of the week, months and shapes. During circle time a teacher will most likely say important things such as news for the classroom, and could go over a couple classroom rules. Although, sometimes it might be too much information at once it can be helpful to separate a few things for some days of the week. For example, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday go over ABC's, and numbers. The next days like Thursday and Friday go over the days of the week, months and shapes. Have a nice set schedule that will also help children remember days of the week and have them feel less overwhelmed. Having a good climate and environment for your class can help children be more involved and interested. A tip University of Pennsylvania mentioned was to keep circle time short at the beginning of the year and extend circle time as time passes. Some children might be ready for circle time but others might not. For preschool aged children it is important to have them participate in activities during circle time instead of just having them listen and watch (University of Pennsylvania, 2016). It also states that during circle time preschool aged children are able to discuss their problems or something that might happen during outdoor play or in class in general. It gives children the opportunity to create new rules. Educators can also present new ideas, use music, or do a show and tell.

The third area of self-regulation addressed in my project is preschool aged children will be able to use impulse control. Executive function is a set of mental skills that includes working memory, flexible thinking and self-control (Peacock, 2023). These skills are associated with the ability to set and achieve goals. Preschool aged children might find it difficult to raise their hand and find it easier to shout an answer out. From preschool they move up to kindergarten and a lot of kindergarten teachers expect students to raise their hand before speaking. There are so many techniques to call on children to participate instead of raising their hand. A technique some

teachers might use is having popsicle sticks with the children's name, taking one out and calling their name to participate. Preschool children love when you pick them to answer questions or have them participate. Students do need a demonstration, so they can understand what is expected from them if you are trying to teach them to raise their hand. If it is important for them to raise their hand, enforce it on them, remind them you will not listen to their answer until they raise their hand (Linsin, 2020). Linsin also gives a list of steps to follow to help children raise their hand. The steps are to model, use the "how not" strategy, practice, limit, ignore and enforce.

It is important for children to understand self regulation. In the report "*Top 20 Principles from Psychology for pre-K to 12 Teaching and Learning [PDF]*" (2015) it mentions how self-regulation assists children by learning and self-regulatory skills can be taught. It explains how "self-regulatory skills, which include attention, organization, self-control, planning, and memory strategies, can facilitate mastery of the material to be learned. " All this can also be taught by giving instructions, modeling to children, classroom organization, and structure. It is important for teachers to give clear instructions for children to understand what they are expected to do. For example, teachers can model to students how circle time should look like and how they should be raising their hands during circle time. Another tip would be for teachers to set goals and tasks very clearly to children.

There are two types of learning strategies for self regulation one which is cognitive learning strategies and metacognitive learning strategies. Cognitive learning strategies focus on rehearsal, organization, and elaboration strategies. It is important to be organized and clear when teaching preschool children it will be a smoother process and transitions can also be smoother. On the other hand, metacognitive learning strategies focus on self-assessment, goal setting, and monitoring. " The term metacognition could be defined as the ability of individuals to know their

cognitive functions, monitor them while they operate, control and adjust them according to the needs of the learning process” (Mistsea, 2019). “If children are well regulated then they benefit from more instructional time. Meaning, they know the instructions of the classroom and may also know how to control feelings and emotions when having indoor or outdoor play.

In conclusion, self regulation is something that is very important in every child's life. Some children might learn self regulation earlier than others and that learning it sooner or later is okay. Teachers or caregivers should teach children emotional regulation and behavior regulation. “Self-regulation is essential for learning as it allows students to attend to important information, remember instructions, stay on task, and process necessary information” (Savina, 2020). If a child is self regulated then teachers, parents and caregivers might understand the child’s feelings because the child will be able to express themselves. When a child is self regulated in preschool the transition to kindergarten is going to be a lot smoother. The article also mentioned that if kindergarteners are self regulated they showed better math and reading skills during first and second grade (Savina, 2020). Not only that but more successful from kindergarten to sixth grade. That is why it is important for children to learn how to control their feelings and express their feelings, learn how to stay in circle time and learn self control when raising their hand. During my project I helped my students with emotional, behavioral and executive self regulation.

Theory

The theory I used for this project is Albert Bandura’s social learning theory. The theory mentions how children learn by observing others. There is an example where it shows the process of the theory which is attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Children

can learn by watching people model or reading a book that sets examples. First, the child must pay attention to the models that are being shown. In order for a behavior to be imitated it must grab a child's attention (Mcleod, 2023.) Second, the behavior must be remembered. Although it might be noticed, it's not always remembered which causes children to not imitate the behavior. Third, perform the behavior that the model demonstrated. In some cases physical ability limits children. They might want to follow a behavior but are unable to follow it. Lastly, model the behavior that was demonstrated. Observers will consider the rewards and punishments that a behavior might follow. If children think the behavior is not important, they will not imitate the behavior (Mcleod, 2023.)

Albert Bandura's theory applies to my project because I will be teaching my preschool aged students ages 3-4 with certain model behaviors. Albert Bandura's theory applies to my preschool classroom because his theory mentions how people learn through observing, imitating, and modeling behaviors. It mentions how we learn through watching others behaviors or actions. Preschool children might have a hard time learning how to regulate their behavior or emotions. If preschoolers watch my behavior when sitting down in circle time or watch how I raise my hand when I'm supposed to instead of shouting out an answer they will feel motivated to imitate my behavior. Some developmental issues for this age group might be feeling distracted because other friends in the classroom might not be paying attention during circle time or have a hard time expressing their feelings. Apparently, the process often involves modeling after those who are nurturing figures in their life (Mcleod, 2023.) For some preschoolers their teacher might be someone who nurtures them and they feel comfortable with.

Consideration of Diversity

My project took place in Salinas, CA at Laura's Barn Childcare and Preschool in Blanco Circle.. This child care center/ preschool offers infant care, toddler care and the pre-k program. I did my project with the preschool program and it is a class that has 5 girls and 8 boys that brings a total of 13 students. I do have a diverse class. In my classroom there are Hispanic, Korean and White students. They are all ages 3 or 4 years old and the lessons were given in English. All my students are proficient in English. My project was for my preschool aged students where I taught them how to express their feelings and emotions, how to have self control in circle time and how to raise their hand when they need to speak. All the activities and lessons I planned out were preschool aged for my students to understand and comprehend. I also planned my activities with a curriculum that I knew they were interested in.

Learning Outcomes

I designed a week of 3 lessons and 6 activities for children about self regulation. The project had three learning outcomes:

1. Preschool children will be able to appropriately express their feelings to their friend when something is bothering them.
2. Preschool children will stay on task for 15 min when sitting down in circle time.
3. Preschool children will raise their hand before speaking.

Method

Location and Participants

This project on self-regulation skills was presented at Laura's Barn Child Care and Preschool in Salinas, California. I had three lessons and they took approximately 15 minutes each. The participants for my project were children from ages 3 to 5 years old. There were five girls and eight boys in my classroom. Twelve of my participants speak English only and one is bilingual. I have eleven White students, one Hispanic student and one Asian student.

Procedures and Materials

For my first learning outcome, my focus was showing students how to appropriately express their feelings to their friends when something is bothering them. During small groups which are a group of two children and a teacher we went over a "my feelings" chart. The chart shows students different feelings such as feeling excited, sad, angry, happy, loved, embarrassed, scared, disappointed and the list goes on. I asked every student "How do you feel today?" and they would tell me their answer. After that we went on to have our second circle time of the day where I cut out the faces of the "my feelings," chart. I asked every student what the expression was showing. I also went ahead and asked "what is this facial expression feeling?" the students would raise their hands and I called on someone to tell me the answer.

We showed the "my feelings" chart for two days. On the last day of our lesson, during our second circle time of the day I talked to them about how some friends sometimes have trouble explaining their feelings. I explained how we all might show our feelings differently. For example, I told them how some might jump from excitement or scream of excitement. Not only that but some might scream because they feel upset or cry because they feel upset. At this point I gave a couple of scenarios to them. An example I gave was "How will Joseph feel if William takes away the fire truck toy?" A few said Joseph would feel sad or angry. Another scenario I

asked was “ If Addie and Avery are building a house with magnets and Samuel comes and destroys it, how will Addie and Avery feel?” A few said they would feel angry, sad and disappointed. A third scenario I gave was “If Sofia and Brianna are playing together and they see Olivia alone and invite her to play, how will Olivia feel?” Most students mentioned that Olivia will feel happy and excited because she was invited to play. We then ended circle time with me explaining to them how it is important for them to be able to express their feelings when feeling a certain emotion.

For the second lesson, my learning outcome was for children to stay on task for 15 minutes when sitting down in circle time. The first day I started with our daily routine for circle time which is singing the good morning song, going over our ABC’s, numbers, shapes, colors, and classroom rules. This week our letter of the week was letter C, which was a great opportunity to read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, by Eric (1969). This was a very successful circle time activity because the children were very entertained during circle time and were participating in the story time as well. On the second day, during our circle time we went over pretty much our daily routine for circle time again, but this time I decided to add an activity with mindfulness. This time we ended our circle time with yoga. I instructed the children to make a circle and I would sit inside the circle they made to instruct them. We did yoga for about seven minutes. The children enjoyed this activity so much. To make this more interesting I would call on a student to come in the middle and start doing yoga poses with me. In my classroom we also started a family tree wall where every student got to bring pictures of their family. Once we got all thirteen families we decided it would be perfect for children to start showing us the pictures of their family. On Friday we decided to have students share their pictures. We started off our first circle time with our daily routine and then called on four students to share. For our second

circle time of the day five students were able to show us pictures of their families. By the end of the day, we had our snack time and once students were done our last four students got to share their family pictures..

For my last lesson, my learning outcome goal was for preschoolers to raise their hand before speaking. I would say since my first lesson my students were very good listeners and learned that they should be raising their hand before speaking. I have been working on this with them and they've actually gotten better. During circle time I remind them to raise their hand before speaking. For example, on Monday's I will usually say " raise your hand if you want to share what you did this weekend?" When they hear that they know I will not call on them if they don't raise their hand. I also worked on an activity with them called " I will raise my hand for..." During this activity I asked them what they should be raising their hand for and I would write down what they would tell me. Some mentioned they will raise their hand when they need to share a story, they need help, or they need to go to the restroom.

Results

The first learning outcome was that preschool children will be able to express their feelings to their friends when something is bothering them. During this assessment I had thirteen students participating. If every child was able to describe or mention an emotion to me they scored 100%. For this assessment 13/13 students were able to mention an emotion therefore, my class got a 100%. My assessment was successful because every student understood feelings and how to express themselves to their friends and myself. This first learning outcome was fully met.

The second learning outcome was that preschool children will stay on task for 15 minutes when sitting down in circle time. For my second assessment I had thirteen students as well. If

every child was able to sit down during circle time while I was reading, participating in yoga and presenting their family picture they would pass. During this assessment 13/13 students passed therefore it was a 100%. This was very successful because children were very interested in their friends' family pictures and participated in circle time. Not only that but they participated in yoga and when I was reading they were sitting down and very engaged. With three days of working on this learning outcome, this learning outcome was fully met by all my students.

The third learning outcome was that preschool children will raise their hand before speaking. During this assessment I did go over certain reminders. For my last assessment I had thirteen students. If every student was able to complete their activity and mention a reason why they should raise their hand they would pass. All my 13 students were able to mention reasons why they should raise their hand therefore it was a 100% for this assessment. This activity was fully met because my students would raise their hand and follow instructions.

Discussion

This capstone project focuses on preschool aged children's development of self regulation. My project was successful because students learned about self regulation and improved their behavior. My first learning outcome was for preschoolers to be able to express their feelings. The second learning outcome was that preschool children will stay on task for 15 minutes sitting down in circle time. The last learning outcome was that preschool children will raise their hand before speaking. The three of my learning outcomes were successfully and fully met. My learning outcomes were fully met because my students were very engaged in my activities and were very interested in my activities. My project worked well with my students' development because they learned how to stay on task and also learned how to raise their hand

when they are supposed to. All of my 13 students understood and were engaged in my assessments. Therefore, they were 100% met. Until this day my students still follow instructions and raise their hand. When expressing feelings I am able to understand my students feelings and they are able to tell me what is going on if they are stuck in a certain situation.

For limitations on my project, I would say that a difficulty I had was coming up with activities. The learning outcome I struggled with finding activities for was activities for circle time. I had to really look up successful activities that would entertain students during circle time. I also asked teachers around the preschool for ideas that would have my students engage and stay focused. Something I can do to strengthen, expand and assess methods would be practicing these learning outcomes longer and having a routine set for them to understand better. Although we were already practicing how to raise our hand, I feel like I could have better activities for my students.

For future directions of this project, I think the age group was perfect for my project. In the future I would like to implement this project with younger students ages 1 to 5. I would like to tell the teachers with the younger age group to start practicing the learning outcomes with their students. That way when their students move up they already have some knowledge on how to express their feelings, staying on task in circle time and raising their hand when they're supposed to. I think students practicing this at a younger age would benefit them, parents and teachers. Something I would also direct for this project and do differently would be talking to parents and giving them information about how they can also help their children in expressing themselves and their feelings. Sometimes parents can get stuck and not understand their child and I think getting some information would be helpful for students to also understand their own feelings. One last thing I would do differently in the future would be having a whole curriculum on ideas

and activities. I can work with my students to understand their feelings and the feelings of their friends, staying on task and raising their hand.

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Appendix A

Questions asked:

1. How do you feel today?
2. What is this facial expression showing?

MY FEELINGS!



Appendix B

Read “ The Very Hungry Caterpillar - Eric Carle

Yoga Activity - <https://youtu.be/Eia8cn0TvIw?si=bGQs>

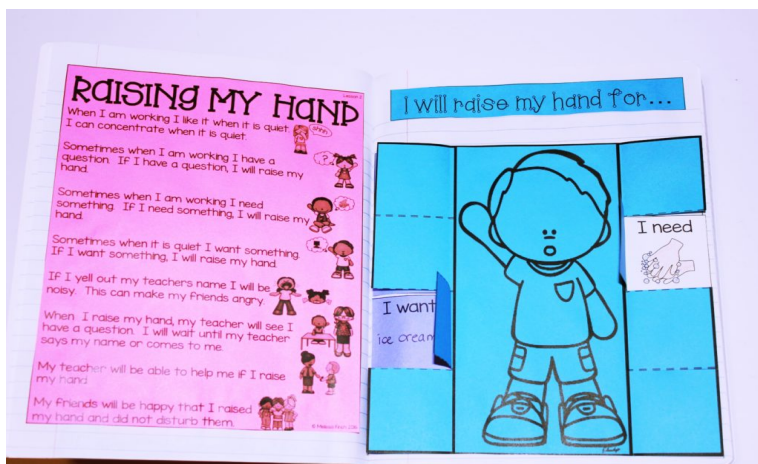
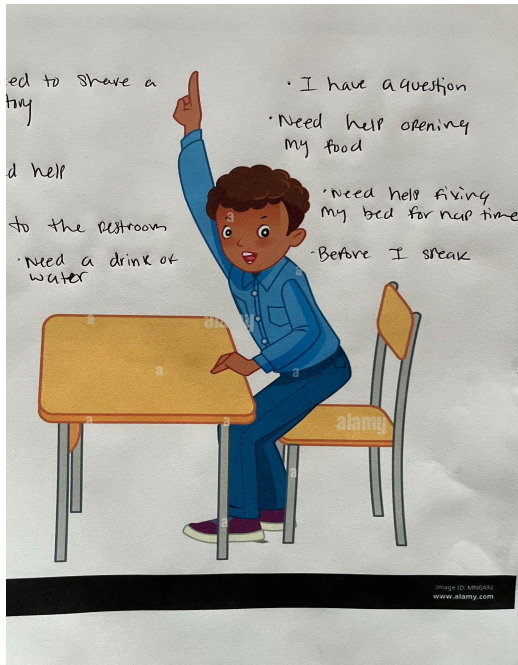
Students Family Pictures (they brought from home)

Appendix C

Questions asked:

Raise your hand if you want to share what you did this weekend?

What should you be raising your hand for?



Self Regulation in a Preschool Classroom

Karen R Vasquez
Human Development and Family Science

Introduction

1. Self-regulation involves children's developing ability to regulate their emotions, thoughts and behavior to enable them to act in positive ways toward a goal.
2. good early self-regulation is associated with later positive developmental outcomes.
3. Working in a preschool made me learn that some children have a harder time controlling their emotions and behaviors.
4. I also just had a baby and teaching my son self regulation is very important for myself. I want him to be able to regulate his emotions, as i've seen children struggle a lot with emotional development.

Needs Statement

1. Young children have a harder time with self regulation than an older child would.
2. Preschool children might struggle controlling their feelings and emotions.
 - It's difficult to recognize and understand emotions within themselves and others without the support of adults.

Participants

- 13 students (5 girls and 8 boys)

Needs Statement

Researchers have found that...

- During preschool, children don't have the vocabulary or social skills to explain what they want or need (Abrams, 2023).
- Something that parents and teachers should avoid is harsh or severe discipline because it can mess with a child's mental health (Abrams,2023).

Theory

- Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory
- The theory goes over how children learn by observing others.
- Albert Bandura's theory applies to my project because I will be teaching my preschool aged students ages 3-4 with certain model behaviors.



Learning Outcomes

I designed a week of lessons and activities for children to understand and follow self regulation. By the end of my project preschool aged children will be able to:

1. Preschool children will be able to express their feelings to their friend when something is bothering them.
2. Preschool children will stay on task for 15 min when sitting down in circle time.
3. Preschool children will raise their hand before speaking.

Method (Participants)

- **Participants:** 13 students (5 girls, 8 boys)
12 speak English only, 1 is Bilingual.
- **Culture/Ethnic:** 11 White, 1 Hispanic, 1 Asian.
- **Age group:** 3 - 5 years old.
- **Location:** Laura's Barn Childcare and Preschool in Salinas, CA.

Method (Procedures)

L01: Express their feelings

Procedure

- Introduced "My feelings chart"
- Showed them faces from the "my feelings chart" and had them answer the emotion of the face.
- Gave scenarios.

L02: Stay on task during circle time

Procedure

- Read a book
- Mindfulness Activity
- Presenting family pictures.

Materials

- "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle
- Yoga Youtube video
- Students family pictures

L03: Raise their hand before speaking

Procedure

- Reminders
- "I will raise my hand for..." activity

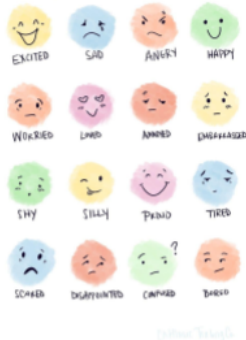
Materials

- Questions
- Worksheet activity, "I will raise my hand for..."

Assessment result: L01

Preschool children will be able to express their feelings to their friend when something is bothering them.

MY FEELINGS!



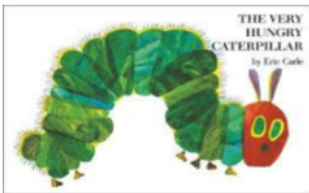
Questions asked:

- How do you feel today?
- What is this facial expression showing?

Results:

- L01 was fully met.
- 13/13 students answered my questions and participated during small groups and circle time.

Assessment Result: L02



[Bluey Yoga | Calming yoga for Kids](#)
[| PE Cool Down | Brain Break](#)



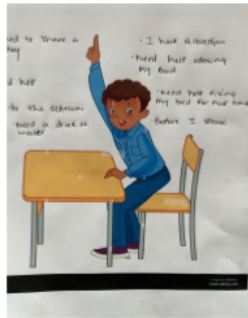
Preschool children will stay on task for 15 min when sitting down in circle time.

Results:

- L02 was fully met.
- 13/13 students engaged in story time, participated in yoga and presented their family pictures.
- Students also sat very quietly and in place during circle time.

Assessment result: L03

Preschool children will raise their hand before speaking.



Questions asked:

- "Raise your hand if you want to share what you did this weekend?"
- "What should you be raising your hand for?"

Results:

- L03 was fully met.
- 13/13 students, engaged in the activity and completed the activity.

Discussion and Conclusions

Success:

- Learned about self regulation and improved their behavior.
- All my learning outcomes were fully met.

Limitations:

- Struggled to find activities for circle time.

Future

Directions:

- Implement this project with younger students in the center.
- Have a curriculum on ideas and activities for all 3 of my learning outcomes.

Thank you!



Questions or concerns

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